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**Tribes and federal agencies create unprecedented  
agreements to benefit Columbia River Basin fish**

**Portland, Ore.** - Four Columbia River Basin tribes and three federal agencies today announced the start of a public comment period for an unprecedented set of proposed agreements and comprehensive actions designed to improve habitat and strengthen fish stocks in the Columbia River Basin over the next 10 years. The participants also believe these proposed agreements will fundamentally improve the working relationships between these tribes and the federal government, focusing on common goals and ending decades of litigation.

The Columbia River Basin agreements build on "biological opinions" for listed salmon and steelhead and the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's fish and wildlife program. They provide common goals and priorities for hydro system mitigation; additional hydro, habitat and hatchery actions; greater clarity about biological benefits and secure funding for 10 years. In fact, as NOAA Fisheries prepares its latest biological opinions for issuance and filing with the U.S. District Court of Oregon on May 5, 2008, these agreements underscore that the new salmon plan is being developed with the highest-ever level of stakeholder collaboration and support.

"Working for the salmon is sacred work," said Fidelia Andy, chair of the Fish and Wildlife Committee of the Yakama Nation Tribal Council and chairwoman of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. "First and foremost, the Columbia River Basin agreements deliver certain and stable resources to do this work for salmon, steelhead and other species throughout the Columbia River Basin. The agreements will get our governments out of the courtroom and back on the firm ground of mutual goals and collaboration."

The agreements are the result of two years of extensive negotiations between Indian tribes and the federal agencies. The proposed Memoranda of Agreements (MOAs) are with the federal "Action Agencies" that have a responsibility for operating and maintaining the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) as well as for selling the power from these facilities: the Bonneville Power Administration, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation. The FCRPS Action Agencies have agreements with the following entities:

- The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation;
- The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon;
- The Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation;
- The Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission;
- The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation;

Under these agreements, the federal agencies would make available approximately \$900 million over 10 years to continue existing programs and to

implement new priority fish projects with the tribes. Most of this money would be provided by BPA. The tribes commit to accomplishing biological objectives with the funds, linked to meeting the agencies' statutory requirements. These agreements would promote a collaborative relationship between the parties for 10 years. The parties agree that the federal government's requirements under the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act and Northwest Power Act are satisfied for the next 10 years and that they will work together to support these agreements in all appropriate venues. The agreements would specifically resolve, for these parties, ESA litigation pending before Judge James Redden of the U.S. District Court of Oregon.

The announcement today also begins a BPA-led public process that seeks input on the proposal to enter into these agreements as negotiated and potential environmental effects of these proposed agreements. The comment period will close April 23, 2008. A decision on whether to proceed with the agreements will follow the public comment period. For more information on the public process, please visit [www.bpa.gov/comment](http://www.bpa.gov/comment).

Steve Wright, BPA administrator, explained that these agreements are meaningful for every citizen in the Northwest, no matter where they live.

"These agreements should provide greater certainty for Columbia River Basin fish recovery activities and for Northwest ratepayers," Wright said. "The Columbia River has provided innumerable benefits to all of us here in the Northwest, and these agreements are about giving back to the river and helping to meet our tribal treaty and trust responsibilities by providing even more support for the fish species of our region."

Wright added, "We have spent decades arguing with each other. Today these parties are saying let's lay down the swords, let's spend more time working collaboratively to implement measures that help fish and less time litigating. I give Judge Redden credit for leading us down the path of collaboration."

For specific details of the MOAs and the types of projects involved, please visit: [www.critfc.org](http://www.critfc.org) and [www.salmonrecovery.gov](http://www.salmonrecovery.gov).

#### **Additional comments from regional tribal officials**

"These agreements reflect our strongly held belief that it takes partnerships and hard work among many stakeholders using an array of strategies if we are to succeed with fish recovery.

***~Chairman Mike Marchand, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation***

"The Umatilla Tribe has long recognized that collaboration and partnerships are essential to salmon recovery. Each one of us brings something special and unique to this agreement. It's this diversity of resources and knowledge that will be instrumental to our success. The Umatilla Tribe knows this to be true based on demonstrated success of restoring salmon to the Umatilla River. I am hopeful that the next 10 years will see great strides in the health of the Columbia River Basin, the salmon and those who depend on their existence."

***~Chairman Antone Minthorn, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian***

**Reservation**

"The Yakama Nation views execution of this memorandum of agreement as a tremendous opportunity for the Yakama Nation and other tribes to put their significant expertise to work in promoting recovery of listed species, significantly enhancing habitat for naturally spawning fish and in greatly increasing salmon abundance for tribal and non-tribal users alike. We view it as a new chapter in true cooperation with the Columbia River hydro operators and believe it will provide significant benefits to fish and wildlife over the term of this agreement and beyond. Yakama truly believes that such a cooperative effort will provide benefits far beyond those available through the continuation of litigation, in which the Yakama Nation has been highly successful, but which has resulted in few if any true benefits to the resource."

***~Chairman Ralph Sampson, Jr., Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation***

"We came to the table with the federal agencies as courtroom adversaries. We leave that table now as partners. We have built an aggressive plan that fixes problems wherever the fish encounter them. We relied on people who work and fish on the rivers to tell us what should be done. Our objective was clear from the start -- increase the health and number of salmon, steelhead and lamprey. We have set high standards for ourselves, and we will track and report our progress. Our plan gets the focus and energy where it must be now - on recovering fish, providing opportunity for our tribal fishers and on finding real solutions rather than blame."

***~Chairman Ron Suppah, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon***

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